

# TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL CULTURE IN YAKUTIA: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

著者	BOYAKOVA Sardana
journal or publication title	Northeast Asian Study Series
number	6
page range	57-68
year	2003-09-20
URL	<a href="http://doi.org/10.50974/00133157">http://doi.org/10.50974/00133157</a>

# TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL CULTURE IN YAKUTIA: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Sardana BOYAKOVA

## INTRODUCTION

The native peoples of the North developed a harmonious adaptation to their extreme natural environment during thousands of years of living in high latitudes. They created a unique circumpolar civilization, which preserved cultural stability in spite of the powerful influences of time and climate. Settling in the Arctic areas in early ancient times, the autochthonic nations mastered specific types of economies, cultures, and mechanisms of health and life preservation in the natural climatic conditions of the North. The northern peoples developed a set of ecology-based, principles of production over time. Acts of colonial and environmental invasion characterized the beginning of quite another type of Arctic development, oriented toward active, continuous use of natural resources. The ecology-based culture and economy established by the native peoples were subjected to significant transformations under the influence of the industrial expansions. The environment deteriorated, and great changes took place in the native peoples' demographic, social and cultural spheres. The North became the raw materials provider to the Center of the government. Federal ministries and industrial monopolists consumed the natural resources of the region indiscriminately as they pursued their own interests. The lack of adaptability of the northern social environment and culture to an alien technical civilization led to myriad, interrelated, negative impacts on the environment and culture: economical, ecological, moral, and social impacts.

During two centuries these processes were developing in the Yakutian territory. For ages these lands were occupied by various nations such as the Yakuts, the Evens, the Evenks, the Chukchees, the Yukagirs, and the Dolgans; nations that differed in their origins, languages, and ways of life. Centuries of conjoint living in the undivided natural landscape of the north, as well as interethnic interaction, promoted the formation of common historical and cultural spaces. The original civilization of the northern peoples, living in harmony with nature, and submitting all their living cycle to its laws, was formed.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this article is to show the special features of the traditional ecological

culture of the indigenous peoples in Yakutia and its transformations in the modern era.

The term "culture" is defined as a historical standard of development of the society and the individual, expressed first of all in the organization of the peoples' survival-oriented activities and also in their material and spiritual values. In the Russian ethnography it is reflected in concepts as "material culture" and "spiritual culture." As for the northern cultures, the ecological character of their economy and culture, their traditional subsistence, settlements, and religious views and rituals have been studied sufficiently (see Alekseev 1975, Krupnik 1989, Nikolaev 1964, etc.). The evolution of the modern indigenous perspectives on the ecology of the North has been studied less often. This article will not only fill the gaps in the historiography of the subject, but it will be a base and background for subsequent studies.

This article is written on the basis of close studies of literature, the periodical press, folklore and ethnographic sources. Sociological data (the opinion poll of the Kolyma group of uluses (districts) and Nuyrbinsky ulus residents, made by the workers of the Institute of Humanitarian Research) are also used.

The sociological opinion polls in three uluses (Verkhnekolymsky, Srednekolymsky and Nizhnekolymsky), situated in the basin of the Kolyma River were done in 1991 in connection with the proposed construction of a hydro-electric station on the Srednekan River, the right tributary of the Kolyma River. The region is interesting because it was an object of intensive industrial development, beginning in the 1930s. The representatives of four Yakutian indigenous peoples, Yukagirs, Evens, Yakuts, and Chukchees lived here for many centuries. The data of the opinion polls in Nurbinsky ulus in 1989, 1990 and 1999 are also used. Monitoring was done in connection with the beginning of some wide-scale projects of the diamond mining industry in the ulus territory. The sociological data was processed with attention paid to the degree of respondents' environmental awareness, their knowledge of the ecological traditions and customs of the indigenous peoples of the North, and their observation of these traditions.

## **TRADITIONAL ECOLOGY-BASED CULTURES OF THE YAKUTIAN PEOPLES**

Thousands of years of living in extreme climatic conditions formed a special strategy of survival of the Arctic peoples, based on the optimal functioning of the system "nature-man-production-ecological traditions". This strategy included strict observation of ecological regulations and restrictions of the consumption of natural resources, developed from the indigenous ancient experience and economy of nature conservation in the North.

In the extreme polar natural environment, the peoples' cultural and economical peculiarities were subordinated more to the physical, geographic, and ecological conditions than to traditional and economical activities of the cultures which occupied the region

(Zykov 1994). When there was a question of some peculiarities of traditional economical culture, the criteria of demarcation were not ethnic, but rather geographical and climatic zones. There are two geographical zones studied in this article: the tundra and taiga.

Traditional northern methods of economy such as fishing, reindeer-breeding, hunting and gathering were popular throughout the Yakutian territory. The local characteristics of subsistence depended on the types of flora and fauna found in that climatic zone. For example, in the valleys of the Lena, Yana, Indigirka, and Kolyma Rivers, cattle-breeding was developed in steppe centers, which was brought to the North by the migrating ancestors of Yakuts (Sakha) from the South. All economic activity was severely restricted to the natural cycles of the seasons. In winter, native peoples hunted animals including polar fox, sable, fox, and squirrel. In winter the fur was thick; it was used in dress making and also as market goods. They hunted reindeer and elk in spring and in winter. In early autumn they hunted geese, ducks, and swans. The summer was devoted to fishing, the most important activity. Yakuts prepared hay for their cattle in the summer. Reindeer-breeding, dog-breeding, and gathering were ongoing activities.

These seasonal changes were combined with a flexible system of seasonal migration. In winter the reindeer-breeders moved to a forest zone, where there were reindeer pastures with abundant feed, and low trees protected the herd from the strong northern winds and snowstorms. In summer a return to the coast defended the herd from mosquitoes and midges. The fishers spent winter hunting far from the mouths of rivers.

In this severe climate and enormous area with low density settlements due to the tundra's low feed production, the quality of communication systems has been an important factor for survival. Reindeer and dogs, which could travel large distances, and which require minimal care in conditions of constant migration were used as draught animals in the arctic zone. Yakuts bred a special strain of Yakut grazing horses for this purpose.

As S. Lurie wrote, the need to survive is the driving force behind man's adaptation to his environment. There are patterns of behavior which make it possible for him to earn his bread, to build dwellings, and to make clothes in ways that are suited to the geographical and climatic conditions. The adaptations of the native peoples to the environment were both material and social. The construction of dwellings, the style of clothes, the technology and rituals of survival, were material adaptations. Forms of social and economic organization, flexibility in the face of changes in the environment and in relations to other human groups, were social adaptations (Lurie 1997). It should be added that the northern peoples' culture of survival was based on a thick layer of religious beliefs and moral and ethical principles, which defined people as being part of nature. Their gentle attitude towards the animal and plant worlds, the animation of nature, attaching sacred status to land formations (mountains, rivers, lakes, etc.) became an integral part of the national character and mentality of Yakutian indigenous peoples. Clean water and air, and the overall condition of the environment took high positions in the hierarchy of values of the northern peoples and were connected with the peoples' health, which were always

recognized as the greatest values in any society.

Hunting rituals belonged to a number of widespread and complex customs, preserved since ancient times. For some nations, such as the Evenks, and Yukagirs, hunting was the main subsistence; for the rest it was an important part of a complex economy.

There was a particular group of spirits who were believed to be masters of the forest, and who controlled success or failure in hunting. The Yakuts and Evenks considered Baai Bajanai a pivotal spirit. He was described as a joyful old man with gray hair (Alekseev 1975). Before hunting they made a sacrifice, a wood fire, to Bajanai to appease him. A disrespectful attitude towards this spirit was considered to be one of the reasons for an unsuccessful hunt. Success in hunting depended on the observance of a variety of rules, prohibitions, and attitudes towards the quarry.

A special etiquette of hunting was developed by the Evens. For example, they never needlessly killed birds and animals. It was absolutely forbidden to kill animals, birds, and even rodents, which came to the aid of humans during a natural disaster or for other reasons. There was a special ritual to perform on a dead animal. There were certain precautions taken during the skin removal and dressing of a reindeer or elk carcass: one could not shed the blood of the animal on the ground. In addition, the cranium and tubular bones required a special burial. The hunter's charms and rites expressed first of all a respectful relationship to spirits - they were the protectors of hunting and the forest. Hunters had to offer apologies to their quarry for their actions, because according to the Evens' traditional ideas, the animals were their elder brothers (Belyanskaya 2000).

All Yakutian native peoples attributed supernatural qualities to the bear, calling the bear "grandfather," and "forest-dweller." One was not permitted to kill a sleeping bear in its den, otherwise, other bears could attack sleeping hunters. Speaking about bears in a disrespectful way was prohibited - the bear could hear and get revenge. When they eat the bear meat, the people should make crying sounds like a crow. The bear's skull had to be hung on a tree.

Hunting female animals with babies or young animals was not allowed. It was prohibited to kill sleeping animals and birds and to take eggs from nests. Children were not allowed to play with the quarry. To ensure these prohibitions were followed, each hunter had to make safe traps and hunting equipment.

No less complex systems of protections and rituals were connected with fishing, another system of traditional survival. They should not name specific large rivers and lakes; they were all called Ebe (grandmother). They made sacrifices to them, throwing coins, beads, strips of leather, and food. It was considered a great sin to drop an iron spade in the water. The people tried to get it back immediately, even in the winter. Spitting in the water, or throwing dust or waste was prohibited. It was prohibited to cry, or to make any noise during fishing. Fishing in a particular river was restricted by the amount of use (Poiseev 1999).

According to the traditional worldview of the Yakuts, the Earth or mother-earth was a living being. Sacrifices were made. The Yakuts could not make "wounds," i.e., it was prohibited to cut down trees and to pick flowers. There was a strict system of sacred, everyday prohibitions towards treatment of the earth. There was an underlying concept of measure and conservation in the survival culture of the Yakuts: hunting excessively was not allowed, i.e., mother-earth's reserves could not be expended.

The introduction of Christianity among the indigenous peoples did not break the established ecology-based worldview. The peoples continued to live within the frame of their natural cycle, being occupied with traditional ways of managing resources. Perceiving the internal ritual side of Christian religion, the Yakuts, the Evens and other northern nations remained pagans in their souls. They continued to worship their spirits and shamans. Holidays that coincide with the natural cycles in Yakutia became the most honored sacred and ecclesiastical holidays: Iegoriep - Egor (May) - a complete melting of snow, Nikola (22 May) - beginning of summer in Yakutia, tsar Kostyakin - Konstantin (3 June) - the birds coming to the islands, Mikhaila (21 November) - the beginning of the polar night. It is characteristic that the Yakuts and the Evens, who never part with icons, left them at home while hunting "as they did not yet understand in hunting." "Ichchi" (spirits) of various places spirits of islands, seas, rivers, forests, etc. were considered to be experts in this affair (Toll 1959).

Thus, not only older generation of the peoples in Yakutia worked out and preserved a certain "summary" of ecological knowledge, a special traditional system of nature conservation and protection measures which regulated the relations between people and their environment. Traditional rituals regulated the use of nature. A man was a part of nature, and nature itself was animated. The earth, water and forest had various spirits. Observation of the rules and customs expressed respect for the spirits. To the traditional worldview, use of force or coercion over nature (e.g., underground explosions, mining, etc.) was perceived as a crime.

During the Soviet era Yakutian territory became a region of wide-scale industrial development. A large mining industry was created in the Far North-East of Asia: here they mined gold, diamonds, tin, coal, mica, oil and gas. Several hydroelectric stations were built to provide the industrial enterprises with electric energy, the largest of which was on the Vilui River.

Industrial development in Yakutia caused a complex of ecological, economic and social problems for the indigenous peoples. Uncontrolled industrial expansion and ruthless exploitation of renewable and un-renewable natural resources violated the ecological balance, broke the foundations, and the structure of the survival of the peoples. In the districts, where industries conducted a mass seizure of ethnic lands, most of the indigenous peoples were evicted without any compensation from their villages. In these areas there was a flood during the construction of hydroelectric stations or where there were underground explosions. Decreases in available reindeer pastures, and hunting and fishing

areas took place. At the end of the 1980s the non-native population was 70 percent of all Yakutian residents. Non-natives were drawn by opportunities to earn money, worked here for a small time (as a rule, about 3 years). They had no nature protection or conservation traditions and they brought to the North barbarian methods of hunting and fishing.

There were some qualitative changes among the indigenous population during the Soviet period. As a result of collectivization the settlement structure of the peoples was changed. Nomadic northern peoples were transferred to a settled way of life. If parents continued to roam with their reindeer herds, their children lived in the school-hostel, where they were taught in Russian. Yakuts were resettled from their *alaas* (farmsteads) to the villages, built in Russian style. It was prohibited to sell guns freely; a special state license was required. Kolkhoz (collective farms), created for this aim had the right to fish and hunt. They must turn over all their quarries to the state. Repression against shamans, insistent propaganda as regards national customs and rituals as "survivals of the past" promoted a scornful attitude toward the traditional ways of life, the ancestors' cultural and spiritual legacy.

### THE MODERN SITUATION

After proclaiming Yakutian sovereignty in September 1991, one of the new republic's leader's first actions was to create governmental structures for nature conservation and protection, and a policy of national revival. The policy of the former President M.E. Nikolaev, for the first time, was affected to be determined by the demands of the national intelligentsia. The ecological movement in the republic at the end of 1980s and in the early 1990s became the most popular and most radical. It was closely connected with the Russian ecological movement, which appeared after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, but it had its own regional peculiarities.

It should be noted that this democratic, anticommunist movement in Yakutia began from the mass protests against plans to build a green zone in the town of Yakutsk. Then there were political actions with demands to stop the underground explosions in the republic territory, and to make compensation for the damage to the health of the residents of the Vilui River basin as a result of diamond mining, and the construction of the Adychansky and Ust-Srednekansky hydroelectric station building. The main participants in the public, ecology organizations were, as a rule, the indigenous peoples of the republic, who expressed their disagreement with the power of the union ministries and government in their own land, where they became people of "the second quality." The leaders of these organizations, including V. Mekumyanov, U. Vinokurova, I. Nikolaev-Ukhkhan, P. Petrov, and A. Chomchoev, formed a radical part of the Yakut national democratic movement. Under the pressure of the public, an ecological examination of the industrial establishments in the Western Yakutia was completed. They studied the population's

opinions of the importance and influence of the industrial intrusion into the North. The results of this study made it possible for the Republic to create a trust-fund with the income of the diamond mining company to ameliorate the environmental damage, made for the residents of the Vilui group of uluses. Mass protest demonstrations made the union government give up the construction of a series of hydroelectric stations in the north of the Republic.

The Sakha Republic (Yakutia) conducted an active nature protection policy during the presidency Mikhail Nikolaev government (1991-2001). In August 1994 M.E. Nikolaev's famous decree #837 "About measures on development of special protected areas" began a formation of a system of special protected areas in Yakutia - Ytyk Kere Sirder. This system includes two preserves - "Olekminsky" and "Ust-Lensky", four national natural parks - "Lenskie Stolby" (Lena Pillars), "Siine", "Momsky", "Ust-Viluisky", thirty-eight conservation sites for the future, special protected areas, a series of protected landscapes, nature memorials, and twenty-six unique lakes, which were declared as national property. The total area of special protected areas in Yakutia is 50567 thousands hectares (or 17.1 percent of the total area). In comparison the square of Ytyk Kere Sirder must form one-fifth of the republic area. The main purpose in creating the special protected areas was the protection of a tremendous variety of native flora and fauna. Component parts of the system of Ytyk Kere Sirder are sacred places and shrines of the northern peoples (Shamatkova 1998).

The revival of ecological traditions became one of the trends of activity of not only the nature conservation establishments, but also a system of national education. In the 1990s, revivalist programs of national culture, languages, national festivals and subsistence flourished. The Ajyy doctrine-summary of moral and ethical rules of the Yakuts was widespread, which was researched and published by scientist and philologist Lazar Afanasiev-Teris. The Ajyy manual included many nature protection rules such as "take care of your mother land, "do not kill plants, animals, birds, "do not pollute water, "worship mountains, "respect roads, "clean yards, house, "and "worship fire. "The state policy on the development of a national school promoted the introduction of national cultures of the Yakutian indigenous peoples in school curricula as an obligatory component.

## **PRESERVATION OF THE ECOLOGICAL TRADITION OF THE YAKUTIAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN MODERN TIMES**

How was the ecological culture of the peoples of the North preserved after seventy years of aggressive pressure on their worldview? Did the modern Yakuts', Evenks', Evens' Chukchees' and other northern peoples' view about nature and interactions change? Was the policy of revival of ecological culture of the native peoples effective during the past ten



years? It is impossible to answer these questions in a small article, but based on some sociological data we shall try to outline the main points and approaches.

As stated above, by the 1980s there was a critical situation in Yakutia as a result of intensive industrialization. Industrial waste pollution of rivers and lakes, the clearing of forests, the radiation contamination of the republic area as a result of emergency wastes of the underground nuclear explosion, and also radioactive fallout of the remains of atmospheric nuclear explosions in the New Land reflected on the health of people, it led to an increase of death rate and shortened the expected lifespan. The indigenous people, 80 percent of whom lived in the villages and had traditional subsistence: reindeer-breeding, hunting, fishing and cattle-breeding, were the first to feel the negative impacts of industrial development. There was a decrease of available reindeer pastures and hunting areas, and a decrease in the fish population became manifested itself in the regions of intensive industrial invasion.

One of these old districts of development is the basin of the Kolyma River. Industrial development in the Kolymsky region began in the 1930s, when the upper Kolyma Seimchansky gold-bearing district was opened. In 1931 a trust called "Dalstroï" was established for industrial gold mining. Industrial mining of Zyryanka coal deposits on the left bank of the Kolyma River was started in 1936. As a whole, the first period of industrial development of the Kolyma basin was characterized by low technical equipment, weak mechanization of work, wide attraction of prisoners' work. The cutting of the forest for the numerous, but low-powered fleets of Kolyma, and for industrial construction, damaged substantially the ecology of Kolymsky basin.

The next stage of industrial development was in the 1950s, when on the base of liquidated Dalstroï several independent union departments, also specialized in gold mining, were created. The Zyryanka coal - field was developed actively, the Zelenyi Mys sea port and river steamship line functioned. This period generated intensive pollution of the Kolyma River and its tributaries, as results of the activities of the above mentioned departments and also with the building of the hydroelectric station in the upper Kolyma. Social problems became more acute and social -production isolation in the vital activity of two population groups (non-native and indigenous people) formed, coinciding with the ethnic isolation of Russian migrants and the indigenous peoples. A significant increase of population, among which the percentage of casual and criminal elements was high enough, other moral values, propagating by them led to a certain demolition of moral and ethic principles of the peoples. But when at the beginning of 1990s the union government decided to build a new hydroelectric station on the Srednekan River, right tributary of the Kolyma River, the population protested sharply against it. The Public Committee to protect the Kolyma River was created, which succeeded in conducting of scientific social and ecological examination of the project of building of hydroelectric station.

During this experience wide-scale questioning was done among the residents of three Kolyma districts: Verkhnekolymsky, Srednekolymsky and Nizhnekolymsky. An opinion

poll was done in eleven localities, as well as in district centers and in national localities, where the Yakuts, Yukagirs, Evens, Evenks, and Chukchee lived. We were interested first of all in the general environmental problems of the indigenous population of the regions, how they valued the ecological results of the industrial development of the region, how traditional world view influenced their ecological awareness.

It was ascertained that the most part of the Kolyma indigenous population were very concerned about ecological problems. 89.4 percent of the respondents expressed anxiety about the changes in ecology of the Kolyma River. The ecological situation was aggravated by the water pollution (71 percent) and the destruction of plant and animal worlds (51 percent), silt deposits in the tributaries (61 percent). Though there were no questions connected with devotion for traditional ecological culture it was interesting that 49 percent of respondents underlined that the Kolyma River was a national symbol for them. The authors observed that the river had a sacred importance for most residents of Kolyma. The local residents not only carefully observed the custom of "offerings" of coins to the river, but they insisted on it for the visitors, the sociologists. The population was anxious about the fact that in connection with the depletion of fauna and fish, all spheres of vital activity of the northern peoples was endangered. At the beginning of 1990s, 75 percent of the polled men noted that the traditional activities of the economy had fallen into decay.

More than 80 percent of the population of the Kolyma districts was against the construction of the Ust-Srednekansky hydroelectric station. Their opinions were that the building of hydroelectric stations negatively influenced the traditional branches of economy, fish resources, and fur animals. Thus the building of hydroelectric stations would damage the ecological system of the Kolyma River, and the life of people in this region would be impossible.

The indigenous peoples were most concerned about the ecological problems. It should be noted that the indigenous ecological traditions, which they preserved played not a final role. In interviews many indigenous people told how the non-native people had a barbarian approach to fishing: they stunned the fish, and killed them with chlorine. After such methods of fishing the rivers changed to "dead" bogs.

Almost half of the respondents emphasized the need for the Russian and the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) governments to take emergency measures; they proposed to create restricted areas (40 percent), to stop function of industrial enterprises, polluting the environment (34 percent); to restrict the growth of mining industry (14 percent). Seven percent of the polled persons considered that "unfortunately, it was too late to take effective measures, because the natural environment of the North could not be revived, and twenty percent of the respondents proposed to preserve deposits of minerals based on the fragility of the northern nature. Many proposals for increasing environmental protection measures, observance of the rights of the indigenous peoples in the sphere of traditional nature use were included in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) legislation. Ecological experts evaluated the Ust-Srednekansky hydroelectric station project, concluded it was unacceptable, and as a

result this project was never realized.

The real symbol of ecological disaster occurred at the end of 1980s and early 1990s in the regions of the Vilui River basin. Since the 1950s, the densely populated agricultural districts were exposed to the intensive polluting influence of the diamond mining industry. The publication of real numbers, revealing a scale of ecological pollution served as beginning of mass actions to protect the Vilui River ecology. In 1989-1990 the sociologists of the Institute of Language, Literature and History (now it is the Institute of Humanitarian Research of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) Academy of Sciences) studied the population of the districts (uluses) in the Vilui region. These data were published and were made accessible to the masses. In 1999 in connection with expecting of Nakyn diamond deposits development in Nyurbinsky ulus, one of Vilui region, the sociological research was done again. Besides a question on state of ecology and a general condition in connection with social and ecological problems, there were questions on the level of preservation of traditional ecological culture of the northern indigenous peoples, in particular, the Yakuts (Sakha) and Evenks. They target to evaluate the result of the system of ecological education in the republic since early 1990s.

There were the following questions: "What does the concept 'Ytyk Sir' (sacred land) mean?" "What traditional notions, customs and rituals of the Sakha people do you know that are connected with a caring attitude toward nature?"

The answers of the residents of the villages of Khoruluu, Malykai, Chukaar, and Maar were of interest to the author. Two hundred thirty-nine persons took part in the research (49.4 percent men and 50.6 per cent women). Mainly Yakuts (98 percent) and Evenks (2 percent) took part in the survey. We took account of the demographic conditions: social status, age, and the educational levels of respondents for the analysis.

All the respondents knew the traditional ecological concepts well. Thus, more than 60 percent of respondents wrote about "Ytyk Sir" (sacred lands) as "ancient settlements, the family lands", 33.9 percent - "lands, connected with traditional belief" and only 5.44 per cent were unable to answer it.

The majority of the respondents observed the customs and traditions, reflecting the ecological culture of Yakuts. Modern Yakuts, like their ancestors, knew about the importance of a caring and cautious attitude to nature, they considered that it was necessary to feed the spirits of localities and fire, and to follow the important hunting rituals. Both the older and younger men and women were very familiar with the traditional customs of protecting the natural environment. The majority of persons, who knew and adhered to the ecological culture, were men between 31 and 50-years-old. Adherents of traditional ecological worldviews were among all educational categories, but its indices were high among the persons with higher or unfinished higher education. It is a positive indication for the future of the region that according to the general culture standard, the majority of modern Yakuts should have compulsory knowledge of the ancestors' ecological traditions.

Thus, the answers to questions confirm to us that the local population still preserves enough high level of ecological culture, particularly, traditional ecological knowledge and nature protection measures.

## **CONCLUSION**

In spite of the mass propaganda and administrative struggle with customs and rituals during the Soviet period, the indigenous people of Yakutia preserved their traditional ecological culture. Of course, complex structured rituals like the bear festival or the sacrifice to Bajanaï are not conducted in modern times. But the rituals of the feeding of the spirits of fire, forest, river, and sacred tree by roads are preserved. Such rituals are observed even by town residents. It is natural that for some part of the indigenous population it is only an external sign of connection with their ancestral culture, nevertheless, it is obvious that adhering to ecological customs is one of the criteria of self-identification.

Traditional spiritual culture among the less-numerous peoples (Evenks, Evens, Yukagirs, Dolgans and Chukchee) of Yakutia was preserved less than among the Yakuts. Russian-controlled boarding school system broke off the continuity between generations, foundations of traditional child rearing and education in the family. But even here the ecological traditions were firm. According to the data of the Yakut sociologists, 62.3 percent of young northern people know and adhere to national traditions and superstitions (Popova, 2000).

The causes of such preservation lie in the fact that, for the most part, the indigenous peoples in Yakutia kept their traditional way of life and they mainly continue to live in the country-side. Global economic and political changes during the last decade of the twentieth century caused great changes in the social structure of the Yakut society. But here the leaders of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), through the policy of national revival, succeeded in amortizing the possible negative results of a rise of urbanization, the changes of property forms, and the indigenous subsistence during the crisis period. The leaders also adopted nature protection legislation to protect the native flora and fauna from uncontrolled consumption and extermination. The traditional ecological culture was subjected to significant modifications, but most representatives of the Yakutian indigenous beliefs maintained the foundations of traditional ecological worldviews, forming an important part of a traditional way of life.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Alekseev, N.A.

1975 *Traditsionnye religioznye verovaniia yakutov v XIX - nachale XX vv.* Novosibirsk: Nauka.

Belyanskaya, M. Kh.

2000 Severnyi chelovek: traditsii i obychai. In *Tsirkumpoliarnaia kul'tura: Pamiatniki kul'tury narodov Arktiki i Severa (materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii)*. Pp. 96-98. Yakutsk.

Krupnik, I.I.

1989 *Arkticheskaia etnologia*. Moskva: Nauka

Lurie, S.V.

1997 *Istoricheskaia etnologia*. Moskva: Aspekt Press.

Nikolaev, S.I.

1964 *Eveny i evenki iugo-vostochnoi Yakutii*. Yakutsk: Knizhonoe izdatel'stvo.

Poiseev, I.I.

1999 *Ustoichivoe razvitie Severa: Ekologo-ekonomicheskii aspekt*. Novosibirsk: Nauka.

Popova, A.G.

2000 Rol' traditsionnoi kul'tury v sotsial'noi adaptatsii molodezhi korennykh etnosov Severa i Arktiki. In *Tsirkumpoliarnaia kul'tura: Pamiatniki kul'tury narodov Arktiki i Severa (materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii)*. Pp. 26-32. Yakutsk.

Toll, E.V.

1959 *Plavanie na iakhte 'Zaria'*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi literatury.

Shamaktova, L.

1998 Sistema Ytyk-Kere Sirder v osnova ustoichivogo razvitiia Respubliki Sakha. *Aqva* N.3:4-5.

Zykov, F.M.

1994 Arkticheskaia zona Respublika Sakha i ee etnokul'turnye osobennosti. In *Etnos: Traditsii i sovremennost'*. Pp. 51-60. Yakutsk' YaNTs SO RAN.